DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 249 011 RC 014 918

AUTHOR Flora, Cornelia Butler; Stitz, John
TITLE Productive and Reproductive Work on the Family Farm: Changes Among Ethnic Groups in Ellis County, Kansas.
PUB DATE Aug 84
NOTE 25p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Rural Sociological Society (47th, College Station, TX, August 22-25, 1984).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Access to Education; *Change; Cultural Influences; Daughters; *Ethnic Groups; Ethnic Studies; Farmers; Farm Labor; *Females; Rural Environment; Rural Family; *Rural Farm Residents; *Sex Role; Social Change; *Social History
IDENTIFIERS German Americans; *Kansas (Ellis County); Russian Americans

ABSTRACT

This report is based on data obtained from historical documents, quantitative analysis of state agricultural censuses for 1885, 1895, and 1905, and interviews with farm women of Volga and German heritages, aged 14 to 87. The participation of women in wheat-based farming systems in Ellis County, Kansas, is examined as related to the ethnic background of the farm families and changing land tenure patterns of the area. In addition to childbearing, women settlers engaged in subsistence activities (gardening, sale of eggs, butter and cream), hired out for domestic work, and collected bones and chips from buffalo and cattle for sale to fertilizer companies. Because daughters assisted with subsistence activities and/or were sent to work in town as household help, increase in number of daughters was significantly correlated with increase in farm size. For both ethnic groups, participation in subsistence production reduced female educational opportunities. Today, male interests still dominate, but there are more choices available for farm children. Children's choices, in turn, limit choices of the mother. Women continue as gap fillers and shock absorbers. Farm women still identify themselves as such. Like their ancestors, daughters leave the farm when possible. Women continue to garden, raise poultry, and milk cows, but more as a hobby, a way of seeking self-fulfillment, rather than because of economic necessity. (NEC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED249011

PRODUCTIVE AND REPRODUCTIVE WORK ON THE FAMILY FARM: CHANGES AMONG ETHNIC GROUPS IN ELLIS COUNTY, KANSAS

By

Cornelia Butler Flora
Kansas State University
Manhattan, Kansas 66506

John Stitz
St. Mary College
Leavenworth, Kansas 66048

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Cornelia Butler Flora
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

RC014918

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Rural Sociological Society (47th, College Station, TX, August 22-25, 1984).

RECEIVED SEP 1984 ERIC/CRESS

Productive and Reproductive Work on the Family Farm: Changes Among Ethnic Groups in Ellis County, Kansas

Cornelia Butler Flora, Sociology, Kansas State University
Manhattan, Kansas 66506
and
John Stitz, St. Mary College, Leavenworth, Kansas 66048

Women's early and continuing contribution to U.S. agriculture is increasingly being documented (Jones and Rosenfeld, 1981; Sachs 1983; Jensen, 1981; Wilkerseng, 1981). Female participation in productive and reproductive activities crucial for family farm survival and growth has been shown to vary by the type of farming system and the ethnic heritage of the farm family. In this paper, we examine the interaction of the type of participation of women in wheat-based farming systems in Ellis county, Kansas, with the ethnic background of the farm families and changing land tenure patterns in the area. The shifting nature of land tenure arrangements, related particularly to the inflated value of land compared to return to investment and high interest rates, are related to a new division of labor by sex in wheat-based farming systems.

The Setting

Ellis county is located in west central Kansas. Officially organized in 1867, its growth was initially dependent upon the Kansas division of the Union Pacific Railroad, whose intercontinental railway passed through the county. The railroad, granted large tracks of land by the United States

government as an incentive to build, sought to generate short-term profit from land sales as well as long-term profit through increased rail traffic which a more densely settled area would generate. Thus, with the completion of the railroad, the Union Pacific began energetic efforts, both in the eastern part of the United States, particularly Indiana, Illinois, New York, Ohio and Pennsylvania, and in Europe, to bring people to settle along its right of way. In addition, the United States Congress authorized homesteading on the government-owned portions of the land, which attracted less wealthy but equally ambitious people determined to live better, more independent lives (Gates, 1966).

Ellis county was touted by the railroad for its good climate and rich soils. Not mentioned was the tendency of the soil to rapidly erode once plowed, the limited and highly variable rainfall, and the intense extremes in temperature. These unstable environmental conditions, coupled with the highly variable economic conditions for agriculture during the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, made it difficult for farm families to survive as economically viable units in Ellis county. Rapid population turnover was the order of the day. The difficulties of Ellis county farming -- and the discouragement such difficulties generated -- is symbolized by an early and well-financed in-migration of English to the township of Victoria in 1873 to land purchased from the Kansas Pacific Railroad. After considerable investment in installing the latest English livestock production methods -- as well as the superimposition of the lifestyle of the landed English gentry -- the colony was totally dispersed less than five years

later. They were never able to successfully bring crops from the soil (Winther, 1971).

The end of the depression of the 1870's signaled the arrival of the first large wave of immigrant farmers. The majority of these were German-Russians from the Volga region of Russia. They had never integrated themselves completely into their Russian setting (for example, they maintained their German language and their religion, either Lutheranism or Roman Catholicism). Pressure on the available land in the Volga region, occasioned in part by the large families of the German-Russians, plus the threat of conscription, motivated the more far-sighted of them to seek farming opportunties elsewhere. The Kansas land available for purchase from the railroads at prices far less than in the eastern U.S. seemed ideal. Many sold their Russian assets for considerable profit, which, combined with the cash generated the from their agricultural sales after the last harvest in Russia, allowed them to pay for land, passage and basic production expenses upon settlement in Ellis county. A strong ethnic identity, reinforced by a devote religiosity, supported a sense of community, as the more well-to-do Volgas lent money to their comrades, ensuring the establishment of communities in Ellis county that were practically transplants from Russia. Entire villages made the move to the land, bringing with them cultural patterns that were to determine their farming success into the next century (Walters, 1982). The Lutherans settled in the northwest part of the county, while the communities in the southeast, which we examined here, were Catholic.

Besides the German-Russians (referred to as the Volgas), there was heavy migration of Germans as well. Although less united than the Volgas, their ethnic traditions of Lutheranism or Catholicism and family interdependence were strong.

Data for the Analysis

Analysis of women's roles in the farming systems in Ellis county and their changes over time are based on historical documents, interviews, and quantitative analysis of the agricultural census. The documents include community histories of Ellis County townships, generally pulled together to celebrate the towns' centennials, and an unpublished diary of an early Volga settler that provides information from 1876 to 1925. Interviews were conducted with farm women of Volga and German heritages, ranging in age from 14 to 87. In addition, John Stitz has been a participant observer in the county since the mid-1940's and continues to be active in farmers' organizations in the county.

Quantitative data on the farm families of the settlement period were gathered from the annual state agricultural censuses for the years 1885, 1895 and 1905. These annual censuses were mandated by the state of Kansas, under the state secretary of agriculture, and were conducted by the Ellis county assessor. For each year, a random sample of 10 percent of the enumerated households engaged in agriculture was obtained, yielding 273 cases, 60 for 1885, 99 for 1895 and 114 for 1905.

The household originally sampled for each of the three years were then linked to census records for the other two years sampled, giving a total of 299 household units present in two

consecutive census years. Those families present for all three census periods appear twice in this sample. The record linkage procedure allowed for measuring the growth or decline in farm size, farm products, land use, and family size by sex and age. (See Stitz, 1983, for a complete discussion of the coding procedures.)

Land Holding and Family

Low rainfall in Ellis county meant that farm size had to be greater than in Russia, encouraging individual rather than collective farming and continued land acquisition. Those natural conditions, coupled with the fluctuating prices for the wheat and corn that were their major cash crops, provided pressures for continuing farm expansion, by homesteading and by cash purchase. The need for cash increased the pressures on the families. Cash was generated by selling labor. While the temporary migration of the German and German-Russian men seeking wages is more thoroughly documented, interviews suggest that daughters, in particular, contributed to the cash necessary for land purchase and payments by selling their labor as "hired girls" and cooks for harvest crews. It was common in the early settlement period for women to hire out for domestic work to "German" and "English" families who considered them hard working and trustworthy. In addition, women and girls collected chips and bones from both cattle and buffalo which were sold to a fertilizer industry. The work was difficult, carried out in the sun and wind, and carried to railroad crossings to be shipped to eastern factories. Male and female wages continually subsidized the farming enterprises, as the families sought multiple

survival strategies to maintain not only their families, but their communities. During the settlement period, Ellis county was farmed primarily by foreign born families. Of the sample of farm families, 47 percent of the household heads were born in the Volga region of Russia, 17 percent, mostly German, were born in Europe, and 37 percent were born in the United States. The foreign born farm couples were much more homogeneous than the U.S. born couples, with the husband and wife born in the same place. The immigrant couples were generally young, beginning their childbearing as they began their new farming operation. Childbearing and the presence of small children limited women's wage work, but did not limit their income producing actitivies. These families tended to engage in female-based subsistence activities, including the sale of eggs, butter, and cream. These young families were market and cash oriented, although their survival strategies included a great deal of subsistence food production. Cash was reserved for production, not "wasted" in consumption. Even seed, including the famous red winter wheat brought from Russia, was saved, not purchased. Seed potatoes were purchased, but little else.

Despite the diversity of survival strategies, attrition was high. Thirty percent of the families left farming during the intercensal periods. Over 40 percent expanded in size, while 17 percent had no change in size and nine percent decreased in size. During that period, one generally got bigger or got out of farming.

Female Children and Farm Expansion

As we shall see, the presence and activity of women is

related to farm survival and expansion. Yet the migrants differentially brought their sons. Daughters apparently were judged to be less productive in the harsh frontier conditions. Their contribution to the settlement farm family was not at first in direct field labor. In 1885, 42 percent of the farm families had boys over the age of 12 present, while only 30 percent had girls of that age. A statistically significant difference remained in 1895, with 43 percent of the farm families having boys over age 12, compared to only 38 percent with girls. That difference continued into 1905, when 59 percent of the farm families had boys over 12, compared to 53 percent of the farm families with girls. The increase in number of farm families with children over the age of 12 at home is related to the aging of the farm couples between census dates. However, the continued skewed sex ratios of children over twelve (153.3 boys per 100 girls in 1885, 115.1 in 1895, and 112.5 in 1905) cannot be attributed to aging. A part can be explained by the earlier age at marriage for woman.

The ethnic groups were equally likely to have boys at home. However, the Germans were much more likely than either the Volgas or the U.S. born households to have girls at home. Indeed, the Germans, unlike the other two ethnic groups, was more likely to have girls over 12 at home than boys over twelve (51% of the German households had girls at home, compared to 42% with boys at home.

In part, one can assume that female adolescents were differentially left behind, one less mouth to feed in difficult times. But the persistence of the difference suggests that

female adolescents were being sent to live elsewhere. For U.S.-born farm families, such off-farm moves were likely to be education-related, as mothers sought something better for their daughters than the long, hard days gathering wood or cow chips and hauling water. For the German and Volga families, it often meant going to town, but in an income generating capacity, as household help. In these families, the mothers had extra household chores unrelieved by a daughter's help. But in compensation, a small income came in regularly, which was often crucial in maintaining land payments or even buying seed or food for the remaining family members.

Farm survival and expansion depended on a diverse family survival strategy. Those farms which survived and grew tended to go heavily into wheat production. Boys were pivotal for that activity (boys over 12 correlates .21 to acres of winter wheat, compared to .16 for girls). However, wheat production activity was concentrated at particular times of the year, related to plowing, planting, harvesting, and threshing. Since all of those activities required traction power, number of sons was also related to the number of horses and mules a family had (r=.20). Girls provided even more important labor in the day to day care of animals (r=.28 between number of girls over age 12 and number of horses and mules).

Absolute number of sons is related to farm size more strongly than is absolute number of daughters (Pearson's r = .17 for boys, .10 for girls). But clearly the amount of labor provided mediated that relationship, for the correlation is higher for both boys and girls for the number of acres

cultivated (r=.22 for boys and .17 for girls) than for the proportion of acres in wheat.

Although wheat production was the key factor for farm survival and expansion, the farming system in the settlement years was by no means a simple monoculture. Farms grew IF wheat production was complemented by a variety of subsistence and market oriented activities, including the production of corn, rye, millet, sorghum for sweetener as syrup, hogs, poultry, and dairy products. The labor of women and children contributed disproportionately to this complementary agricultural production.

Number of boys and number of girls are both positively related to the value of poultry products sold. Number of girls, but not number of boys, is related to the amount of butter made and sold. While girls contributed more to household transformation of dairy products, boys contributed more to milking. Number of milk cows correlates .20 with number of boys and .14 with number of girls. While both are significant at the .01 level, the higher value for number of boys suggests their importance as a source of labor in increasing the dairy herd.

Number of girls, but not number of boys, is positively and significantly related to a subsistence index composed of production of potatoes, milk cows, hogs, poultry, butter, cheese, and sorghum syrup. These items were ofter sold, but, even more importantly, provided a substantial cash savings for the families which produced them.

The sex of children was clearly important in survival strategies undertaken and the success of those strategies.

Number and sex of adults was also important in determining the form early farming systems took. A substantial number of farm household included adult men or women over 18 in addition to the nuclear family, although about twice as many farm households in Ellis county included additional adult men as included additional adult women. Volga families were least likely to include single adult males (only 19%), while 24% of the German households had single adult males, compared to 38% of the U.S. born households. These adult males were both unmarried sons and hired help. The U.S. born households, with smaller families and less access to unpaid family labor of either sex, were more likely to employ hired field help. Unmarried females over 18 were much less common -- they were enumerated in 7% of the Volga households, 10% of the German households, and 20% of the U.S. born households. This suggests an earlier age for marriage for women than for men. Unmarried single women tended to be "hired out" for wages, particularly from the German and Volga households to the "English" households.

Not surprisingly, presence of extra adult males is correlated with number of cultivated acres (r=.16), although the presence of men over 18 has less impact than the presence of boys over 12 (r=.22) or even the presence of girls over 12 (r=.17). The presence of adult males is most highly correlated to the value of machinery and the value of the farm per cultivated acre. That suggests that a capital intensive strategy is represented by the presence of additional adult single males, while the presence of adult single females and children suggests a labor intensive strategy. The capital

intensive strategy included hiring male labor. In terms of family farm survival during the settlement period, the labor intensive strategy was the most effective.

The labor intensive strategy was related to the presence of both sons and daughters, which was in turn related to fertility and ethnicity. The Volgas had the largest families, followed by the Germans, with the U.S. born farm families trailing in the family size distance. The Volgas had the most staying power, followed by the Germans and the U.S. born again a poor third. Family labor and community solidarity contributed in large measure to their success on the land. Volgas were also the least likely to invest heavily in machinery. Because of their large families and their community support network, they were able to substitute labor for capital, which allowed them to weather the boom and bust price cycle that marked that epoch. In contrast, the U.S. born population tended to invest heavily in machinery, which increased their debt load -- and their bankruptcy rate.

Substituting labor for capital applied not only to their principal cash crop, wheat, but for subsistence activity as well. Here female labor is particularly crucial. Although we have no measures of it from the censuses, since they were biased toward male-oriented cash-producing activities, women's activity in providing food and fuel freed men for field work. Further, the subsistence index is highly related to perseverance in family farming in Ellis county. The more subsistence activities engaged in, the more likely a family was to remain on the farm during the intercensal period (J. Flora and Stitz, 1984). That

subsistence index, in turn, was highly related to the number of productive members per family -- particularly the number of females over 12.

Changes over Time

For the 208 farm families for which we have over time measures of changes in subsistence activity and changes in farm size, there is a substantial correlation between the two variables (r=.16). The correlation is lowest -- indeed, insignificant -- for the Volgas, as they initially had a relatively high measure on the subsistence activity index. The correlation is not significant for the Germans, either. However, for the U.S. born farm families, who started out with the lowest level on the subsistence index, the correlation is high and significant -- r=.36. Clearly engaging in subsistence activities -- which requires female as well as male labor -- is crucial for increasing farm viability over time. For those farm families without the ethnic tradition of such labor use, farm growth meant adopting that strategy -- and including the labor of women as well as men in complementary productive activities.

Increase in number of daughters is significantly correlated with increase in farm size (r=.14), while increase in number of sons is not. The relationship between increase in farm size and increase in number of daughters is not significant for the German born farm families, but is significant for both the Volgas and the U.S. born families. The relation holds even when the age of household head is controlled, suggesting that more than life-cycle changes are being reflected.

For the Volgas, the increase in number of daughters may in

part be attributed to natural increase, given their high fertility. For the U.S. born, the increase in the number of daughters suggests that they kept the daughters at home, rather than sending them away to school. For both these ethnic groups, participation in family-oriented subsistence production reduced life chances that education could produce for females.

Increase in both number of sons and number of daughters is correlated with an increase in number of subsistence activities. For both sons and daughters, the correlation is highest for the U.S. born farm families and is not significant for the German born families. The Volgas show a moderate, significant relationship between increase in number of sons and daughters and increase in subsistence activities.

Daughters and Women's Status

For both the Volgas and the Germans, it was a man's world. When there was money for education, the sons were educated. Education for girls would be wasted, as girls were raised to be married. Marriage as an inevitable fate for women affected property transfer as well. Property -- particularly the valued land that provided the link to community -- went from father to son. Giving girls property was like turning your deed over to another family. Girls were necessary -- but not valued.

Fate was particularly hard for the oldest and youngest daughter in the Volga and German families. For the oldest, family responsibilities meant taking over the chores of the mother, who was often ill from many pregnancies and miscarriages. Diaries reveal that men value their wives for their fertility and their religious devotion to it. Yet

maternal mortality was high in Ellis county up to the Second World War, and many older daughters who dropped out of grade school early to help an invalid mother ended up replacing her entirely when another pregnancy proved fatal. When the father remarried, as he often did, the new, younger wife was happy to have her step daughter continue with the drudgery of laundry, water carrying, fuel seeking and cooking that consumed the hours from before dawn to after dusk.

For the youngest daughter, the pattern was different, but the results the same. She would often be able to complete a few more years of grade school than her oldest sister, but, being the last to leave home, was required by the enormous amount of female work to be done to give up whatever "city" options she might fancy in terms of schooling or employment.

The escape for the daughters in these families was marriage or a religious vocation. For devout families, the choice of a religious vocation for either sons or daughters was an occasion of great rejoicing, although it also indicated the necessity of great sacrifice, both to pay for the education and to replace the labor of the child sent to the Church. The choice of a religious vocation for girls was limited to those with a basic education, and thus priests were more numerous than nuns among the children of the first settlers.

Marriage for a woman often meant moving to the household of her in-laws and taking over the heaviest, most onerous chores allocated to women. While many of the older women interviewed report great respect for their mothers-in-law, and recall fondly the female companionship shared, they also recall their joy of

finally establishing a separate household, where, at least briefly, the number of people served was reduced.

Structural Changes and Patriarchy

The diversified family unit that was necessary for family farm survival required coordination and discipline. Each family member was required to put the good of the family above the individual's desires for growth or change. And, in these traditional Catholic families, the father decided what was good for the family. As he was closely tied into his community, he was closely observed in these decisions. Active in his Church and Catholic men's groups, a father too harsh on his children could be controlled by community pressure, and if necessary, a chat with the priest, often in German, the language with which he felt most comfortable. His wife's status was so closely linked to his that their mutual identity was assumed. While spousal "discipline" was a given right, evidence suggests that Volga and German patriarchs seldom abused their privileged positions, as strong female solidarity networks, also linked to the local priest, provided important protection for women.

The father's control of his children was assured in part because of their economic dependence upon him. While daughters could and did hire out locally for domestic service, they did not view such employment as a viable alternative to their family responsibilities. Permanent local off-farm employment for males was relatively scarce, and made more so by the ethnic insularity of the Volgas and Germans, whose linguistic separateness decreased their commercial employability in Hays, the county seat. They could do as their father told them, with the

understanding that one day they would work in partnership with him or be able to acquire their own land for their own farm. Or they could leave the county. Financially independent sons were not around to confront their father's authority.

The absolute power of the patriarch based on his control of access to land and livelihood began to change with the imposition of secular events on the relatively closed farming communities. World War I came, and, despite local distrust of the German-speaking enclaves, the young Volga and German farmers went off to war. Those that survived came back, married local girls, and, earlier than before, set up independent households, financed in part by their separation bonuses and in part by the post-war boom in wheat prices -- prices that would not again be equaled until World War II. Still, patriarchal authority was economically reinforced by access to credit, machinery, seed and draught animals.

Oil made the big difference in Ellis county. Suddenly young men's labor was scarce, and oil could pay the price that agriculture could not. Now financially independent sons could live in the same county as their fathers -- and out-earn them. At the same time, rural high schools were established, providing another pull against youth working full time on their family's farm. The coming of rural electrification, bottled gas and piped water also lessened the hard physical labor for women. Now daughters could attend school. For women, the introduction of modern technology had a greater impact on daughters than on their mothers.

The influx of capital into Ellis county changed the meaning of land. Now it became a source of investment, rather than a way of life for oneself and one's posterity. Children, too, changed in meaning. No longer were they part of the family enterprise, but an independent unit, seeking independent status and identity.

Our respondents report an increasing focus on youth and youth off-farm activities from the Second World War on. This time, many of the servicemen who survived the conflict did not return, but sought their fortunes elsewhere. Those that did come back had a different world view, more individualistic than in the past. Children stayed in school longer, both in terms of number of years and in hours per day. Extra curricular activities, particularly high school sports, replaced the Church as the center of collective community activity. Initially, high school sports were male sports in Ellis county.

The Decline of the Sexual Division of Agricultural Labor

With the post-World War II generations, family size declined (although families of seven to twelve children are not rare, and the child bearing age of German and Volga heritage women still ranges from 15 to 55). Adolescent male labor, in particular, was less and less available. Mechanization substituted in great measure for the labor previously provided by sons, and, at crucial times of labor demand, such as harvest, children were out of school. Diversified farming operations were cut back, first the dairy cows (in part due to increased sanitation requirement that imposed economies of scale for production of butter, cream and milk), then the hogs and

poultry, particularly as sources of female income. Women began participating more in field activities. Further, as tax laws and formal credit arrangements became more complicated, the wife took over bookkeeping activities as well. In the patriarchal Volga families in particular, finances had been a man's responsibility.

Always an important participant in successful farming in Ellis county, women's labor began receiving recognition as productive work when it entered the sphere previously defined as male. Some women saw themselves as helpers. Others as partners. In either case, the women clearly defined themselves as "place holders" -- filling in with crucial man's work until the son came of age to join his father in production. Once that occurred, the wife could go back to more traditional female duties, which might now include bookkeeping, but modified by the eternal trips to town required to keep a modern farm functioning and modern children properly mobile. Within the smaller families, but not the larger German and Volga ones, daughters, too, became active in field work and large animal production. Such on-farm activity was mirrored by an increased number of female agricultural majors at state colleges and universities.

The partnership mode of division of labor depended on a single family operation, either as a renter, owner, or, as was more and more the case, a mixed owner-renter operation. The male operator needed to be independent of his father to acknowledge his dependence on his wife.

Moving Back to the Sexual Divison of Labor

The period of family financial independence in Ellis county

farming was relatively short-lived, depending in part on the good grain prices of the fifties to allow family farmers to become independent operators. Oil income, both directly and indirectly through lucrative off-farm employment during periods of low grain prices, also helped. Further, several low wage industries employing primarily female operatives moved into Ellis county, providing female labor another way to subsidize low farm prices. Through the mid-1970's family farming, although declining, prevailed in the area.

High inflation in the 1970's, triggered by high oil prices, drove up land prices in Ellis county as it did in the rest of the country. Land costs now far exceeded potential earnings provided by agricultural production. Despite massive mechanization, coupled with a move toward monoculture of winter wheat, returns to investment remained low. Land increasingly was a speculative investment rather than a productive investment. Ownership and management became increasingly separated. The credit crunch of the 1980's, with the deflation of land prices and deregulation of banking which encouraged banks to be tougher about loan making. Increasing threat of farm repossession reinforced that separation.

Whereas the relatively prosperous farming situation aided the middle size farm where male-female partnership is functional, the disadvantageous conditions of the last half of the 1970's and early years of the 1980's created circumstances that removed the household orientation and family participation from the farm enterprise. Some women of Volga and German heritage were able to get back to the farm on a small scale,

investing in farms of less than 50 acres, with the mortgages paid by the urban jobs and those of and their husbands. These women report a joy at returning to the countryside and the subsistence activities that they vaguely recalled from their childhoods thirty to forty years before.

For younger women, without capital or husbands with wage employment in the formal sector, their experience is different. For them, marriage can mean a welcome return to the farm that their education took them away from. However, they are not the partners that women in the fifties and sixties were becoming. Corporate partnerships, either father-son or among brothers (and, more rarely, among in-laws or distant relatives), in Ellis county are male partnerships. It is difficult to find two or more men who can work together and agree on their methods and goals, and, when you double the number involved by including the wives, the problems of social organization seem insurmountable. Thus the farm women we interviewed in partnership farming situations consciously opted out of participation in the major farm enterprise of either wheat farming or cattle raising. (Even in partnership situations, women remain active in farrowing in hog production. We were told that women just naturally knew what to do with newborn creatures.)

The women we interviewed explained to us that it would be disastrous to the enterprise to have someone meddling in the business who understood little about it. One uninterested or uninformed wife among three couples could upset the delicate social balance that allowed all the households involved to make the kind of sacrifices of time and consumption necessary for

farm success. Thus, for these farm women, it was better for none of the wives to be involved instead of risking conflict. These women proudly told us they didn't know what kind of machines their husbands were investing thousands of borrowed dollars in, nor did they feel it was any of their business. The rural "pillow talks" over farm management are clearly an anacronism in a corporate setting, even when the corporation is kin. Women's indirect influence in farm decisions is now subordinated to maintaining corporate harmony.

The farm women in these situations still identify as FARM women, however. Like their ancestors, their daughter leave the farm when possible. And, like their female ancestors, they are beginning to engage in the kind of subsistence activities -- gardens, poultry, and milk cows -- that once allowed the family farm to withstand the ebbs and flows of an unpredictable economic situation. There does seem to be a difference, however. While during the settlement period, farm women engaged in these activities out of necessity -- the same reason they baked their own bread and sewed their own clothes -- in 1980 such activities seem to be more a hobby, a way of seeking self-fulfillment in between driving children to choir practice or the football game or getting the extra machine part from the local coop.

The shift from complementary activities necessary for farm survival. with the farm representing a way of life, has shifted to parallel, distinct activities with the farm representing a way of earning a living and an item of consumption. Male interests still dominate, but there are more choices available

for children of farm households. The children's choices, in turn, limit the choices of the mother. Women continue as gap fillers and shock absorbers.

References

Flora, Jan L. and John Stitz.
1984 "Commodization and Capitalization of Agriculture in the Great Plains During the Settlement Period: Wheat Production and Subsistence Activity". Unpublished paper. Manhattan, Kansas: Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Social Work, Kansas State University.

Gates, Paul W.
1966 Fifty Million Acres: Conflicts Over Kansas Land Policy, 1854-1890. New York: Atherton Press.

Jensen, Joan
1981 With These Hands: Women Working on the Land. New York: The Feminist Press.

Jones, C. and Rachel A. Rosenfeld
1981 American Farm Women: Finding from a National Survey. Chicago, Illinois: National Opinion Research Council.

Sachs, Carolyn E.
1983 The Invisible Farmers: Women in Agricultural Production. Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Allanheld.

Stitz, John M.
1983 A Study of Family Farm Culture in Ellis County, Kansas and the Relationship of that Culture to Trends in Farming. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation. Lawrence: University of Kansas.

Walters, George J.
1982 Wir Wollen Deutsche Bleiben: The Story of the Volga Germans. Kansas City: Halycon House Publishers.

Wilkening, Eugene
1981 Farm Husbands and Wives in Wisconsin: Work Roles, Decision-Making and Satisfaction, 1962 and 1979. Bulletin R3147. Madison, Wisconsin: College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, University of Wisconsin.

Winther, Oscar O.
1971 "The English and Kansas, 1865-1890," in John G. Clark, editor. The Frontier Challenge: Responses to the Trans-Missouri West." Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, pp. 23-273.